

*Hocart—Lau Islands, Fiji*

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Sugar-cane was grated and squeezed onto grated coconut; the grated coconut was then squeezed and the juice was boiled for a long time and stirred the while. In the meantime manioc and bananas were cooked in breadfruit leaves, then pounded; the sauce was sprinkled on the mash with a brush consisting of the folioles of a coconut leaf cut short and tied together. Then the men made the mash into pellets after dipping their hands in the sauce. 252

Dry *sivaro* is so called because there is little sauce and that thick.

Grate coconut fine, shred, put into the pot; add sugar-cane and boil; add water and grated coconut with sugar until it is dry; mix pellets of taro mash with the sauce.

A dish, *waisu*, possibly a Tongan concoction, is made with large plantains slit and stuffed with grated coconut.

*Pekepeke*, or "dipping," classed among puddings, is simply sweet yam dipped in coconut cream with each bite; it is the pudding of the lowborn, a pudding of the bush. The term is also used of a proper pudding in deprecation when offering it to a gentleman.

Tongans do not make many puddings, only *waisu*, *hoho*, and *ngoua*, this last a kind of mollusc called *veata*, in Fiji.

There is a story that a Tongan came to Fiji and tasted some puddings in Mbau. The taste pleased him and he said, "I shall go and make this pudding in my village that I may eat of it with my people." When he came to Tonga he told his people to grate coconut and boil taro. So the Tongans boiled it as he instructed. 253

When it was cooked the Tongans said, "How is it to be made?" Then he said, "I stayed in the house and it was brought in."

So they could not proceed. Hence when a man undertakes to do a thing and after starting finds he does not know how, they use this proverb, "I stayed in the house, and it was brought in."

## FERMENTING

Fermented food, excepting Tahitian chestnuts, have disappeared from Lau, as it is no longer necessary to lay in stocks of food. 251 ●

Bananas and taro in olden times were heaped up in pits lined with leaves and covered over. There food was fermented, giving out a smell unendurable to Europeans. The stuff was taken out when required, cooked, and eaten. The taste is slightly sour. Such food was called *mandrai* from *mandra*, decayed; the word is now used also of European bread.

Fermented Tahitian chestnut was called *sikiviro*. In Kandavu the grated nut is allowed to ferment for two or three days in a wooden trough; it is then pressed into balls, wrapped in breadfruit leaves, and boiled. 252

Yams are never fermented. 251

241 off with a cane knife or more frequently they are twisted until they loosen from the plant, then are thrown into a basket. Old plants are left lying on the spot or, if they are to be replanted immediately, thrown aside.

Manioc roots differ greatly in size and quality on the various islands. Manioc grown on the volcanic islands and on Namuka is better than that from the other islands of Lau and is free of strings. Manioc grown on poor limestone soil contains more starch and less water per pound. On the rest of the limestone islands roots weigh 0.75 to 1.5 pounds. On Mothe, a volcanic island, roots average about 4 pounds. On Namuka the average root weighs about 3 pounds.

● [251] Manioc must be eaten on the day or on the day after it has been taken out of the ground or be preserved by fermentation.

#### Sweet potatoes

The sweet potato (*kumala*, *Ipomoea batatas*) ranks next to manioc as daily food, but the Lauan tires of sweet potato. Adults claim that during the last 10 to 15 years the sweet potato has deteriorated, due to a worm which eats into the tubers. Many sweet potatoes, especially on Kambara, show dry, black decayed spots inside.

The varieties of sweet potato found in Lau are: *kumala ndamundamu* (red sweet potato—red skin, dark pink flesh); *kumala siliva* (brown skin, yellow flesh); *kumala ni Samoa* (red skin, yolk-colored flesh); *kumala vula* (whitish skin, white flesh). Much *kumala ni Samoa* is grown on Namuka, an island known for its good sweet potatoes. All varieties are found on all the islands.

241 Moto of Undu states:

177 In olden days we had no sweet potatoes here. My father told me he remembered very well when the first sweet potato came here. The first to come was the *kumala vula*. Old people told us it came from Tonga. But sweet potato was here before manioc came, because old people said, "When manioc came here we only planted a twig as we had done with the sweet potato. All the twigs died so we had no manioc and almost no sweet potato, because we had planted manioc on the sweet potato land."

Moto's statements are substantiated by other aged informants.

241 If the land has lain fallow it is cleared with a cane knife. Bush roots are pried loose with sticks and pulled out by hand. Clearing is hard labor.

The planting of sweet potatoes was done as follows:

A man gathers plantings from a patch by cutting or pinching off stalks 30 cm. long. The stalks are set about 40 cm. apart in rows about 50 cm. apart. Half the length of the stalk is buried in the loose soil. Sweet potato gardens must be weeded. When the plant has grown the length from finger tip to elbow, earth is mounded, about 25 cm. high, around it. Thus the potatoes develop in the mound and the harvest is easy. It is necessary in most of the Fulanga gardens to make the mounds by hand before planting, for the layer of soil coating the limestone is so thin that a stalk cannot be planted 20 cm. deep if the soil is not scraped together into a mound.

distributed. The sauce is sweetened with sugar cane, ti, or imported sugar. 252  
 Stalks of sugar cane are ground on a sharp piece of coral called *i thoronga* [412]  
 and strained with a hibiscus strainer. The juice is placed in a large pot and  
 stirred over the fire with a paddle-shaped stick called *i yali*, made for the  
 occasion out of the lower end of a coconut-leaf midrib. The resulting caramel  
 mixture is called *salasalaki*. Coconut cream (*lolo*) is added slowly to the *sala-*  
*salaki* and the whole is boiled. The sauce is called *loloriri*.

To make manioc pudding (*mavu*) roots of the poisonous varieties are first  
 made into *tapioka solo* (p. 153). Roots of nonpoisonous varieties are scraped  
 and boiled. The cooked manioc is placed in a long oblong wooden bowl. Two  
 boys, one sitting at each end of the bowl, hold it between their legs, while  
 two young men, one standing on each side of the bowl, pound the mass with  
 pounders (*i mbutu ni nggalu*) made from the lower end of the midrib of a  
 coconut leaf. The pounding is done rapidly and in rhythm, first one lifting  
 and lowering his pounder and then the other. Every three or four minutes  
 fresh men replace the pair who are pounding. The two holding the bowl are  
 replaced less frequently. The pounding continues for about 20 minutes. An  
 older man then sprinkles some sauce over the mass and mixes it by hand.  
 Then he takes some of the pudding in each hand and squeezes each handful  
 quickly into three balls (*nggelena* or *nggele ni nggalu*), which fall into one  
 corner of the bowl. When he has about 15 balls he sprinkles some sauce on  
 a scorched, folded banana leaf (on which the midrib has been trimmed),  
 places the balls on the leaf, and adds more sauce. Another man pleats the  
 leaf into a bag and ties it. A bag of pudding is called *i thovo nggalu*. *Mavu*  
 is also made of roasted breadfruit or of boiled or steamed taro.

Puddings without sauce are made of manioc, sweet potato, Tahitian chest-  
 nut, banana, taro, and *yambia*. Some pudding recipes follow:

**Matimali.** Peeled ripe bananas are pounded by hand in a wooden bowl. Dry  
*yambia* starch and the milk of green coconuts is added. The mass is mixed and divided  
 into portions, each portion is wrapped in a scorched banana leaf, then in breadfruit or ti  
 leaves and steamed.

**Vakalolo vuntchi (banana pudding).** Coconut cream is added to peeled, ripe,  
 pounded bananas. The mixture is divided into portions, which are wrapped in banana  
 leaves and steamed.

**Vovo.** Green bananas are boiled, peeled, and pounded. Grated coconut is added  
 and the pudding is ready to eat.

**Tololo.** A mixture is prepared as for *tapioka solo*. Before steaming, coconut cream  
 and grated coconut are added.

**Tahitian chestnut pudding.** Grated Tahitian chestnuts, grated coconut, and coconut  
 cream are mixed and divided into portions which are wrapped in ti leaves and steamed.

#### PRESERVING

Fermented food (*mandrai*) is especially important on Fulanga, where any 251 •  
 surplus of food is preserved for times of scarcity. Manioc imported from

- 251 Mothe, Namuka, or Komo to Fulanga is made into *mandrai*. The two methods of fermenting are soaking in salt water and burying in the ground. The salt water method, used mainly by the men, serves to preserve food for a short time. Baskets of manioc are fastened to stakes in a sheltered spot in the lagoon. When needed the roots are scraped, pounded, mixed with grated coconut, made into balls, wrapped in breadfruit leaves, and either steamed or boiled (pl. 2, B). *Mandrai* is also made in pits of brackish water. One such pit, called Neikathi, is located at Nggaralevu, south of Undu on Kambara. The pit is about 10 meters deep and the water is reached by means of a wooden ladder. The pit was formerly also used for soaking *wangiri* nuts.

Food may be preserved for a year or more by the burial method described as follows:

A hole (called *alua ni mandrai*), about 1 meter deep and 2 meters in diameter, is dug in the ground. It is lined with three thicknesses of freshly made *mbola*, coconut leaves split from the midrib and plaited. The freshly plaited coconut leaves are placed with split midribs toward the rim of the hole, the leaves radiating toward the center. The first row extends about 30 cm. outside the rim of the hole. Above the plaited coconut leaves is a layer of banana leaves, which have been dried in the sun and from which the inner side of the midrib has been stripped. The food to be preserved is placed on the banana leaves. Such a pit holds about 100 pounds of scraped manioc. Over the food is placed another layer of banana and another of plaited coconut leaves. The whole is weighed down with heavy stones.

Breadfruit and banana are also fermented in this fashion. If preserved food is kept for some time in a *mandrai* pit, the banana and coconut-leaf lining must be changed frequently. One pit is used repeatedly.

#### PREPARATION OF BUSH FOOD

- 252 *Wangiri*, the chief food of olden times, is said to have been prepared as follows:

The *wangiri* nuts were first roasted on a bed of coals in order to crack the shells. Next they were soaked in brackish water for at least "four nights." Finally, they were either boiled in pots or steamed in an earth oven. For a hurried meal the nuts were roasted.

Roots of the *yaka* (*Pueraria thunbergiana*) were steamed in the earth oven or roasted.

The fruit of the *tarai* were strung together on a stick and steamed in the earth oven, then the skin was removed. The *tarai* was also boiled or eaten raw.

The *mbawaki*, *yaumitha*, and *nggalaka* fruit were also steamed. The *yau-mitha* was first wrapped in breadfruit or *vanua* leaves. It was also roasted.

Tree grubs (*yavatou*) were wrapped in *vanua* or *varale* leaves and steamed or boiled. They were frequently eaten raw.

The preparation of greens is described on page 155.

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The traditional diet was further safeguarded by an ingenious and self-regulating system of co-operative production and distribution, which encompassed all the local groups in the community. On each inhabited island an hereditary officer called the *vaka vanua* is custodian of the jungle fruits and crops. The traditional role of the crop custodian was to watch the island's food supply and, as each major food crop (whether wild or cultivated) matured, to place a tabu on it. When the custodian considered the crop under tabu to have ripened sufficiently, his traditional role was to remove the tabu and to arrange for the collection of first fruits by village and clan groups. The first fruits were then placed on the village ceremonial ground (*rara*) and divided by the custodian into two portions, one for the island chief and one for the people. The chief's portion was presented to the chief ceremonially by the custodian or by another officer of the aboriginal class, called the *takala*. The portion of the first fruits reserved for the people was divided by still another officer, called the headman of the ceremonial ground (*tui rara*),<sup>20</sup> a title hereditary in an aboriginal clan. It was the responsibility of this official to divide the food so that each clan received a fair share. When crops were abundant, part of the first fruits were set aside to be fermented and stored against time of scarcity. After the first fruits ceremony the people of the island were free to gather the remainder of the crop, each group from its own lands.

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In this island community where food was none too plentiful and famine a constant threat, the institution of the crop custodian functioned, in total context, to conserve and augment the food supply of each island by preventing the crops from being consumed before they had attained their full size and maturity and their highest nutritive value. It thus served as a public health and resources conservation measure of considerable significance to guard against famine, to obtain the optimum size and food value of the crops, to insure a more equitable distribution of the limited food resources of the community as a whole, to build up community health through more adequate nutrition, and to accumulate a surplus in times of plenty for use in times of scarcity. It should be noted that on each island only the major food crops were placed under tabu. These differed from island to island and from season to season, depending on local conditions as judged by crop custodians, and thus the custodian institution had considerable flexibility.

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When the British system of indirect rule was established in Lau, however, the office of crop custodian was not incorporated into the administrative set-up. Indeed, its very existence was probably unknown to Europeans. Moreover, the Lauans soon became confused as to which chief should receive the offering of first fruits—the traditional island chief, whose office had not been recognized officially in the new government system, or the local village chief, an

<sup>20</sup> The *tui rara*'s functions were performed on Fulanga by the *tui raro*, an aboriginal clan title.

officer newly created by British regulation. Consequently the crop custodian, although continuing to function in a limited way on all the inhabited islands of the community (except Namuka where the crops abundantly cover the needs of the population), has lost considerable authority and prestige. The number of fruit and garden crops placed under tabu for first fruits presentation has decreased in number, at least part of each crop being consumed before it has fully matured, especially on the limestone islands. Food is rarely stored against time of famine, and in general the crops are smaller in size than formerly and less valuable from the viewpoint of nutrition. 13  
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As part of the production and distribution system mentioned above, each inhabited island also had a master fisherman (called *ndau ni nggoli*), who had charge of all the island's fishing grounds, communal fishing expeditions and turtle hunts. The office of master fisherman is held by a clan belonging to the noble class, except on islands where that class is absent. The traditional role of the *ndau ni nggoli* was to master the fish lore and fishing techniques of the island and to study the habits of various edible species of marine life in relation to the local fishing grounds, the tide and currents, the weather, the lunar cycle, the seasons, and the presence of noxious plants which render edible species poisonous to man. Although men and women caught fish offshore singly or in groups of two or three by means of nets, lines, and spears for their daily household needs without special permission from the master fisherman, they observed his regulation of the fishing grounds and no large, organized fishing expeditions took place without his sanction. Indeed, the master fisherman himself organized and led all communal turtle hunts and most large fishing parties. Women's communal fishing was led by the wife or daughter of the *ndau ni nggoli*. 13  
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The institution of the master fisherman functioned to increase the total catch by protecting the local fishing grounds from over-fishing and undue disturbance, and by taking advantage of the various group-fishing techniques in relation to the weather, the seasons, and the habits of various edible species. In a community where fishing provided the major protein constituent in the daily diet and an indispensable part of every feast, this institution operated as a public health measure of prime importance in creating and maintaining a balanced relation between the community and its marine food supply. The traditional functions of this institution and its ecological significance are clarified by the fact that, although the prestige and authority of the master fisherman have not been reinforced by the British and consequently this native official has lost status, he still operates unofficially to a limited extent on every inhabited island in the community. As a result of his lowered status and decreased power, however, informants say that the fishing grounds of the various islands are more disturbed than formerly, that there are fewer organized fishing expeditions, and that the catches are smaller than they used to be. [558]